



**Government of Pakistan
Ministry of Human Rights**



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INTERACTIVE TRAINING WORKSHOP

Human Rights Communication & Advocacy

SESSION 02

WRITING THE ' PERFECT PRESS RELEASE '

Who? What? When? Where? How?

TYPES OF PRESS RELEASES

Press releases should accompany reports, be issued in response to news events, discuss new research on human rights violations or abuses and raise relevant issues. Most should be simple press releases of 1 or 2 pages and be structured for immediate release.

- **Report-related press releases**: These press releases should be prepared well in advance as they are meant to inform the media about a larger product – a long-form report.
- **Joint press releases**: These releases are jointly issued by more than one organisations. This requires an introductory paragraph saying it is a joint statement.
- **Longer or extended Press Releases**: A two-page news release, followed by up to 5 pages of supporting accounts from witnesses or victims, evidence, or additional information.

LANGUAGE

A press release should be written in clear, direct, active, reporting language, as close to a news story as possible. It is always in the third person, and should include attribution with statements of fact, either to a source or to MoHR. We don't have to attribute each sentence as long as it's clear in subsequent sentences that the source has not changed.

HEADLINE

Focus on the headline, lead, and quote to maximize media coverage. The top line of the headline should ideally be 6 or 7 words or fewer. Most headlines focus on the news being reported in the press release. On occasion, if you are commenting on an already-reported news development, it can be an advocacy statement. Most headline words are capitalized.

Example:

Sindh: 100 Women Killed in Honour Killings
Cover-up exposed as bodies exhumed

KEY ELEMENTS OF A PRESS RELEASE

Include the following elements from the first draft, even though some details, such as telephone numbers, may require clarification;

- Headline
- Subhead (unless presser is shorter than a page)
- Dateline (City – preferably relevant provincial capital or Islamabad, date, year)
- Body Text (including a quote in the third paragraph and the kicker). Another quote may be appropriate elsewhere depending on length.
- Contacts: location, name(s), languages, and contact number(s) in correct format, email, and Twitter handle if relevant. For example:

In Islamabad, John Lipton (English, Urdu, Punjabi, Potohari): 0300-XXXXXXX (mobile); or j.lipton@mohr.gov. Twitter: @JohnLipton

Links to report, past releases, and other relevant documents

STRUCTURE OF A PRESS RELEASE

Best press releases are written in the “inverted pyramid” style (see below). The reader will decide based on the headline and first sentence whether they want to read more.

1st paragraph

The first sentence tells the news, and the shorter the better, ending with “Ministry of Human Rights said today/said in a report released today/ said in a letter today to XYZ.” A second short sentence can provide additional key information: “The launch event is expected to be held on March 21, 2020, at Marriot Hotel, Islamabad”. If there is a news peg, be sure to mention it here. The first reference to a date should be high up in most cases and includes the year. Subsequent dates don’t unless they refer to a different year.

2nd or 3rd paragraph

A second paragraph can have additional important facts, if needed.

The third paragraph should be a quote telling the reader why this development is important in the most compact, interesting, conversational, and memorable way. The goal is to see the MoHR spokesperson quoted in the reporter’s story. It should be two tight sentences with the attribution after the first. A quote can only be attributed to one person; it should give their name, and compact title. The quote should not introduce statistics, national or international law, or other new material. The only verb to use with quotes is “said”—never “declared” or “asserted” or “stated.”

3rd, 4th, and perhaps, 5th paragraphs

Give more detail—summarize what happened and place it in context. The reader should have enough information to understand what happened without extraneous details.

6th paragraph and beyond

You might want a paragraph or two of background, following by a paragraph or two of the relevant national and/or international law as appropriate. The final paragraph is often a “kicker” quote, another quotable two-sentences that sum up

the message. The form is “ _____,” said last name only. Don’t quote someone in the last paragraph who has not been quoted or introduced earlier.

Provide web links to previous MOHR work wherever it would be useful and use hyperlinks instead of repeating the information from previous news releases in detail. Link to phrases that are likely search terms.

At the end of the release, provide links to any related or additional information. Then provide contact information.

USEFUL TIPS

- Avoid passives ("Decisions were made")—it may seem you don’t want to assign responsibility—unless this is a deliberate decision.
- Try to keep the news release to a single page. If the release is for a report, you can go to two pages, but make bullet points or recommendations to keep journalists interested.
- Read major media stories daily. You’ll notice the form outlined above.
- Read press releases written by civil society organizations and NGOs. Assess which are most effective in getting the point across.
- Re-read your final version aloud; it makes problems easier to spot.

MEDIA CONTACT LISTS

- Create and maintain a master list of national and international media contacts.
- Staff should cultivate media contacts but there should be a central media office that distributes all press releases.
- Update media contacts lists regularly.
- Meet regularly with the journalists listed.